**Our partners response to coronavirus: what we’ve heard March 20th**

The first action we took was to write to all partners to assure you that our funding is flexible and you can use it as you need to support your operations at this time. in response we’ve had conversations with a number of you who have let us know about the measures you have in place.

Across the board, partners are trying to balance public health needs whilst also doing their utmost to support young people. For the overwhelming majority, this balancing act has required significant alterations to working patterns and service delivery at short notice.

Below is just a selection. **Would you be interested in hearing more? We would like to convene a zoom meeting of partners to discuss some of these shared challenges. Would you be interested in taking part? Please email** **tessa.hibbert@blagravetrust.org** **to indicate interest in a shared Zoom call in the near future.**

**Operational impact**

The first measure our partners report taking is setting up the ability for staff to work from home as much as possible. This involves investing in new technology where appropriate. One concern of some partners is the use of common technology such as whatsapp or facebook group could blur the lines between personal and professional so they are investing in new platforms to keep work separate and protect confidentiality. A really useful guide to the digital challenges of remote meetings:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-dZatSZTc9cNcVa_CxnmJfXt_UxN3fbt/view>

And this is a useful guide to working remotely for charities: <https://medium.com/wethecatalysts/how-to-work-remotely-in-a-time-of-coronavirus-19603e363ec9>

All partners are starting to plan now for staff shortages due to sickness or isolation. There may well be costs in the future to take on additional staff members should staff fall sick in large numbers.

Lots of these issues are covered in a great new guide produced today by the NYA: <https://youthworksupport.co.uk/> which has guidance for young people, youth workers, and youth organisations on the new ways of working and its implications.

**Impact on group work**

The urgency of the advice to avoid mass gathering has been interpreted differently by different partners. Some feel that it is a lifeline for young people that it would be a mistake to take away at this time, as long there is an ability to manage respiratory and hand hygiene. Most have closed all indoor provision in line with schools. Those that run outdoor sports activity intend to continue to offer this. Clearly all who are running services are being hyper vigilant about hygiene and asking young people to self exclude where necessary. Some are moving the young people they would normally support via groups to a one to one model.

**Impact on one to one work**

Those that offer one to one services such as counselling and mentoring will in normal time often meet in public spaces eg cafes, or in client’s homes. The partners I’ve spoken to have cancelled this in favour of online or phone delivery. Zoom is a popular platform. Others use Google Hangouts and Facetime.

Here is a brilliant guide to using social media in your work with young people:

<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/3548/social-media-youth-worker-guide-branded.pdf>

Some partners have concerns (justified or not) about security online and prefer phone access. Where service delivery by phone is in place partners are utilising this. One partner prefers phone calls as feels conference calling is a more confidential way to involve more than one person. Another is RAG rating their cases and putting in place telephone/video contact as appropriate. For those at high risk or in crisis they continue to provide face to face support whilst being mindful of social distancing.

Partners highlight the need remains to offer practical help to young people. where possible they are keeping centres open with a skeleton staff in order to hand out food parcels. Others emphasise their importance in ensuring young people eat well with hot meals and intend to stay open as long as they can.

**The good news!**

Young people are creative and positive and coming up with some fantastic ideas in the current situation. One of our partners led by students has created a WhatsApp group for all its volunteers to share ideas and they are currently planning the development of wellbeing resources for other young people in the community which could include reflective activities, zines and video blogs. They are really positive about the possibility of reaching out beyond the young people they were already working with. Likewise, another is developing fun activities to be put online that young people can stream whenever they want, and say it’s a chance to develop some of the ideas they were already working on with young people. Some young people are setting up a community connections project where they can share ideas, experiences and support each other via online platforms. They are also planning to make ‘care packages’ to be posted to other young people or dropped into their houses. These would contain everyday luxuries to help young people look after themselves.

**Some questions…**

In such circumstances it can be hard to know whether you have covered all eventualities. We have therefore gathered together some of the questions partners have been asking of themselves and some practical changes they have made. We hope it is helpful, although we are sure it is incomplete. If there is anything you think we should add to the list below, do please let us know.

* Have you asked the young people you work with how they now want to access your services? Have you asked them which they want to see prioritised if circumstances necessitate a reduction in services?
* How can you support young people who have, up to now, engaged through group work? Is an online offer the best response, or could 1:1 meetings be more appropriate?
* Is your website aimed at young people and does it provide resources for them? It might be too big a change to redesign a website if you don’t feel it offers enough direct support, but could you signpost them to other services?
* Are you creating opportunities for young people to explore any concerns they may have about Covid-19? Whilst we all want to continue delivering our work during this time, it is important to acknowledge that the virus might need us to change not only how we deliver, but also what we deliver. You might want to raise awareness of resources such as that produced by the Anna Freud Centre: <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/anna-freud-learning-network/coronavirus/>
* If staff are starting to work remotely, consider whether easy-to-access technologies, such as WhatsApp and Facebook, blur the line between personal and professional lives. Staff might be happier to use dedicated ‘work’ channels such as Slack, Zoom or Microsoft Teams.
* Even with staff working remotely, what contingency planning do you have in place for staff members being sick? Do your HR processes hold up if the staff are working remotely e.g. how do staff report sick?
* Do all your staff have access to internet at home and how can you support those who aren’t online?
* What impact might Covid-19 have on your financial circumstances and in particular your ability to hold fundraising events and meetings? How will this affect your cashflow and reserves?

Advice and guidance is available at <https://youthworksupport.co.uk/>

This is a working document. If you have any feedback please get in contact with tessa.hibbert@blagravetrust.org. We’d love to hear from you.

Tessa